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ABSTRACT

The variety of English spoken and written by Filipino natives is examined, and its particular usages or "perduring features" are reviewed. Filipino English is shown to be influenced by the structures of native Filipino language(s), and by the historical and cultural contexts in which it is learned. It is argued that Philippine English, as a language variety, is in a state of flux and is in the process of standardization, with a clear consensus only on which variety is most acceptable for the spoken phase and with a conservative stance taken on all other features of spoken or written English. While American English continues to be the reference standard for writing and for language education, the spoken variety is tolerant of peculiar modes of stress and little attention is paid to intonation, as intonation carries little functional load for changes of basic linguistic meaning. It is also argued that spoken Filipino English stresses the necessity of maintaining phonemic distinctions with regard to the vocalic system and with regard to certain distinctions in the consonantal systems. (JL)

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The Philippine Variety of English and the Problem of Standardization

Andrew Gonzalez

1. Introduction

Very early in the period of American colonization of the Philippine Islands, native speakers of American English noticed that even with native speakers (the so-called Thomasites) as models in the primary school classrooms of the archipelago, locals (even bright ones) could never quite master American English pronunciation.

The team that accomplished the first major evaluation of the Philippine educational system after twenty-seven years of colonization and American education, the Monroe Survey Commission, described the speech of the pupils as 'bird-like' (see Monroe, 1925). Less charitable designations were 'Bamboo English' or 'Carabao English'; one snobbish Englishwoman whom I heard in the early 1960's described it as 'pidgin'.

The Monroe Survey Commission called attention to the fact that Filipinos were at least two years behind their American counterparts in language skills, not realizing that if this evaluation were true (it was, based on the nation-wide tests administered), they should have been proud rather than regretful considering the huge gap between the language skills of a native speaker and a second-language learner.

Beginning in the 1930's, felicitously documented by Raqueño's masteral thesis and doctoral dissertation (1940 and 1950), the grammatical and mechanical errors of Filipino students at all levels of schooling in all parts of the Philippines have been documented to the point of ennui. This genre of scholarship, preceding TESOL's error counts in the late 1950's, has continued practically unabated in the Philippines (see Gonzalez 1986 for a review of the literature on this point).

When a more tolerant spirit of the times prevailed and when prescriptive grammar gave way to descriptive grammar and the new Englishes gained legitimacy, Gonzalez (in a Regional Language Centre seminar-workshop in 1981) asked in a paper, 'When does an error become a feature of the new variety of English?' without really coming up with a categorical answer but settling for some general guidelines for acceptance. Ultimately, the need for standards, especially for teaching and for publishing, had to be recognized.

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In 1969, Llamzon published a book and claimed that de facto from the speech of educated Filipinos, Filipino English had become standardized and forthwith described it in his volume; he has since withdrawn the claim of standardization, although one of his masteral students (Martinez 1975) has compiled a manual of pronunciation now in use at the Polytechnique University of the Philippines which purports to teach 'Standard Filipino English' pronunciation.

Other descriptions of the Philippines variety of English, called Philippine English, have been completed by Alberca (1978), Gonzalez and Alberca (1978), Casambre (1985) and Marasigan (1981), which she published as a RELC study; in 1986, a doctoral dissertation at RELC and National University of Singapore was completed by Hermosa and described Filipino English as a 'study in contextualization'.

More recently, through his own study of phonology (Gonzalez 1984) Gonzalez and two of his students (Romero 1988) and (Jambalos 1989), have come up with empirical studies on features of English as spoken and written in the Philippines 'across generations' (before the second World War and after) and have come up with a list of what they call 'the perduring features of Philippine English', that is, features of spoken and written English that are found across all generations of Filipinos, from those who were taught during the first two decades of American colonial government by native speakers to the present. There is thus empirical basis now for declaring these as in effect the norm more than 'deviations'.

A stratified purposive sampling of subjects (30) of different age ranges (belonging to five different 'generations' of English language instruction in the public schools) was asked to read a passage by Gonzalez and to do a series of translation tasks based on picture stimuli by Jambalos. Romero asked groups from a similar division according to generations to write compositions. The studies sought to elicit problem sounds and difficult (for Filipinos) morphological/grammatical features. For the phonology study, a cut-off percentage of sixty percent was used as the criterion for attainment of a feature where the feature had at least five tokens; for the grammar study, a cut-off percentage of seventy-five percent was used as the criterion for attainment of a feature where the item had at least four tokens. If a particular generation (composed of thirty subjects usually fifteen males and fifteen females) was able to score the desired average, it was considered as having attained the feature. It is in this sense that one speaks of one or more generations having attained a specific feature or not having attained a specific feature. Features not attained are features for which no generation attained the established cut-off percentage of correct responses. These are then described as 'perduring features' of Philippine English. For the free compositions, recurring features found among writers of all generations were considered 'perduring' features of written Philippine English.

2. Critical analysis of features of Philippine English

2.1 A Putative Standard for Spoken Philippine English

A group of Philippine Normal College graduate students (Aquino et al. 1972) administered a listening test to a sample of Filipinos to get their reactions on 'the most intelligible variety of English' for them; based on rather rigorous methods, what emerged as 'intelligible' was a variety of English where the phonemic distinctions of English were maintained even if an 'authentic' American Standard was not attained.

It is interesting to note, however, that based on the Gonzalez study of spoken English across generations (1984), few Filipinos of any generation make certain phonemic distinctions; because of this, Gonzalez has proposed that these 'perduring features' be considered now permanent features (1984: 21):

Vowels

Philippine Substitute		Standard American English
a	for	ae
o (not fully rounded; duratively, short)	for	o (fully rounded, for practical purposes a diphthong ow)

Consonants

b	for	v
t		
d		o
s		z
s		z
flap r		retroflex r

Likewise, stress patterns of many polysyllabic words in the Philippine variety of English do not follow the sound patterns of English stress as described for example in Chomsky and Halle (1968) and through constant use have gained not only frequency but acceptability. Nor is American sentence intonation really mastered by Filipinos other than for critical points: rising intonation to distinguish yes-no questions from simple statements and WH-questions (falling intonation).

As the earlier PNC study mentioned, a phenomenon first observed by the UCLA linguists occurred among the PNC subjects in the 1972 study; they could hear phonemic distinctions without being able to orally produce them themselves! For purposes of standardization, therefore, although the targeted productive distinction may not be attained by all, the distinction is still held to be the ideal and hence should still be included as the standard.

In aspects other than phonology, that is to say, features of morphology and grammar, Alberca (1978) and Gonzalez and Alberca (1978) have described features of written English of the mass media, and recently, Jambalos (1989), under the guidance of Gonzalez, using a production test based on picture stimuli calling for a translation task into English from Filipino, has described features of spoken English. From these studies, 'perduring' features of the Philippine variety of English have been listed. However, since the acceptability of these features has not yet been established empirically (unlike the pronunciation features), at this stage, we cannot make the claim that these features are now 'standard features'. But if any features have the proximate potential to eventually become standardized, these would be the first ones (Jambalos 1990, see section 5.11.3).

These 'perduring' features (see the eight items listed below) and mastery by only one or two generations of other features (such as use of the zero article, use of DID + base form of the verb, use of the base form of the verb with DO/DOES in WH-questions, use of more for comparatives, subject-verb agreement; see Jambalos 1989 section 5.1.1.2) lead me to predict a restructuring of grammar along the following lines:

A tense aspect system of the verb which most likely is a product of interference from the Philippine verb system (which is purely aspectual, tense being marked elsewhere), resulting in an over-use of the simple past tense, the use of the present perfect for the simple past, use of the simple past for the past perfect tense, lack of tense consistency in discourse, non-use of the subjunctive, over-use of the past form of the modals when the present forms would be used in Standard English.

An article system that again is most likely a product of interference from the Philippine determiner system (which is tied up with case marking in Philippine languages and with definite marking) where use of definite/indefinite and zero article is rather different from Standard American English usage:

1. Non-use of the as a definite indicator

   I like wine from France

   in answer to Which of the wines here do you prefer?

2. Non-use of the in

   Majority of the students favored the bill.

3. Use of the present perfect tense to indicate past definite action

   I have visited Baguio last year.

4. Use of the present progressive tense to indicate action begun in the past and continuing to the present

   I am standing here now for two hours

5. Use of the simple past tense to denote two past actions, one before the other

   I already ate dinner when you arrived.

6. No tense consistency

   He said that he is making his homework.

7. No contrast between present progressive and simple present tense

   He is reading the newspaper now. He is reading the newspaper everyday.

8. Non-native use of verb + preposition combination

   Turn out the light.

   He sounded me off about this.

(In the past, I have cited examples of these peculiarly Philippine uses as individual items; I now suspect, though without as yet systematic and rigorous evidence, that more than failure to learn individual rules of article and verb usage, second-language learners in situations like those of the Philippines are using a locally derived subsystem (a product of language mixture from the local system coupled with the English system) which manifests quite different rules albeit there are convergences in surface realizations in certain cases, in which case, the native speaker considers these as 'correct', the others as 'anomalous' or 'incorrect').

Lexical items and Filipinisms (local collocations) are more easy to detect and are found everywhere wherever a language is spoken in a new context; they are usually words from the local languages referring to local realia, or calques from the local languages, or fossilized mixtures (especially in two-word verbs, eg cope up with instead of keep up with, a confusion of keep up and keep with; onion-skinned instead of thin-skinned because of a loan translation for a similar metaphor in the local languages.)

2.2 Standards for Written Philippine English

Although the status and role of English in Philippine society as a whole is rapidly changing at present and is under question in many domains, in one domain, it maintains its supremacy, that is, the print media (see Gonzalez in press, Lapira 1988).

The quality of copy-editing of Philippine newspapers and periodicals before the War, judged by American standards, was very high because native speakers usually functioned as copy-editors of daily newspapers and weekly magazines and periodicals. The post-War period saw the replacement of these native speakers by Filipinos trained in Standard American English by native speakers, with usually some experience of study abroad in a native language situation. The present generation, however, especially during the period of Martial Law (when reputable senior journalists stopped writing and were suddenly replaced by an inexperienced group; see Babst-Vokey 1988) shows a standard of written English which is becoming more and more peculiarly Filipino although style-sheets and standards of usage are still based on Standard American English (see for example Jose Luna Castor's 1966 handbook, recently reprinted by the Asian Institute of Journalism).

As Gonzalez (1985) and earlier Alberca (1978) has described the written variety of Philippine English, in addition to localisms in lexicon (individual words referring to Philippine reality and Filipinisms or calques as well as local combinations of two-word verbs with local meanings) and some peculiarities of grammar (agreement, tense-aspect, article usage, tense consistency) and syntax (some peculiarities of word order), there are likewise peculiarities of writing

style or rhetoric which Gonzalez (1982) has called 'stylistic underdifferentiation' (a more or less uniform classroom composition style which in its best examples is reminiscent of Victorian prose of the nineteenth century) which does not 'shift gears' to take care of other situations of informality. When it does, there is danger of uncalled-for stylistic shifts (documented by Gonzalez, in press) with sometimes humorous effects. The new feature, which is becoming more and more common, consists of long passages of Filipino quoted in an otherwise English article to cite someone's statement; in more informal varieties, a conscious mode of code-switching is used to achieve informal effects (see Bautista forthcoming for the latest review on code-switching and its uses).

Again, the written variety of Philippine English, both as to peculiar features of lexicon, morphology, grammar and syntax, and style (as well as style shifts) is presently in flux. At the actual everyday level, one has only to go through an ordinary daily English paper to see these features in evidence. However, they have not yet been legitimized, since if one calls attention to certain features of grammar, they would undoubtedly be corrected and considered 'mistakes' based on accepted standards dictated by Style Manuals. Most Filipinos, because second-language learners who learn English only in schools, unless they are students of literature and language, are seldom sensitive to nuances of language and hence would be less sensitive to stylistic shifts and their comical or sometimes embarrassing effects unless one patiently explains these to them. In grammar and usage, therefore, the declared standard does exist, at least in intention if not in execution, based on style manuals modeled on those of the United States, which are still in use.

In speaking standards, therefore, in a second-language situation such as obtains in the Philippines, one must make the following distinctions:

the prescribed standard versus the actual variety used in the society

the perceived standard (especially in pronunciation) which may be recognized when it occurs versus the actual local variety in use (even by the prescriber himself/herself)

When one is dealing with a language teaching situation (including the standard to be used in the classroom as well as in the teaching materials being used), one is dealing with the prescribed standard (even if this is not actually attained even by the teacher himself/herself); not only in pronunciation but also in actual grammatical usage can one find instances where a teacher knows the rule, recognizes 'errors' when they occur if these are committed by students, but she herself is unaware that she is committing the same 'mistakes'.

It is at the prescribed, conscious, planned use of language where a choice now has to be made, in the light of the legitimation of the New Englishes, whether one will continue to use an international variety or a local variety.

The standard of Philippine English in the process of evolution is one based on quality and length of education; for this purpose, I have suggested the term edulect, a term which Bautista (1982) used in the literature for the first time in her study of yaya-English (the English of care-givers in the Philippines).

In Philippine written English, based on Romero's (1988) study of compositions across generations, what I call 'perduring features' and what she calls 'persistent errors' are (see Romero 1988: 550-9):

spellings based on pronunciation (eg bisnes instead of business, propesyon instead of profession

past tense/redundancy (eg sprang for sprung/did carried)

wrong form/word choice (eg enrollies for enrollees; anable for enable; the education aspects of the student can be considered satisfactory)

number control (agreement) (eg The situation in the Philippines tend)

wrong prepositional use (eg I am selective of my friends)

nonuse of a (eg __Majority of people are for this.)

misuse of the (eg From the kindergarten to secondary school...; Almost all of our subjects are taught in English (Filipino) except the Science, Math and English subjects.)

3. Implications

For teaching purposes, what are the implications of the above findings?

There is an acceptable variety of spoken English; this spoken variety stresses the necessity of maintaining phonemic distinctions with regard to the vocalic system and with regard to certain distinctions in the consonantal system, although it is tolerant of nondistinctions made with regard to a/ae, u/U. But it will insist on distinctions between i and I, e and I, o and ɔ as well as p/f; it is less insistent on th/dh, v/B, s/z, s/z, and on the flapped instead of the retroflex r.

This standard is tolerant of peculiar modes of stress and seems to pay little attention to intonation since intonation carries little functional load anyway for changes of basic linguistic meaning though not of mood or paralinguistic meaning.

The ideal is aimed for, the real tolerated.

Under this rubric, it would be safe to say that for school use, the standard to be taught should still make room for necessary phonemic distinctions.

For grammar and morphology as well as lexicon, both for the spoken and written variety, there is still widespread agreement that correct grammar must be taught and practiced with regard to subject-verb agreement, tense, tense consistency, article usage, though more often than not the rule is observed more in the breach than in the observance.

On matters of the lexicon and Filipinisms and stylistic shifts, as well as stylistic underdifferentiation, perhaps because most Filipinos are not really conscious of these to begin with, there is less sensitivity and therefore more tolerance in the violation. I doubt if most Filipino teachers of English are sensitive to these matters. These will be eventually accepted or are already accepted though perhaps unknowingly.

For the syllabus-designer and curriculum-maker in the Philippines, this poses a problem. In actual practice, most Filipinos have turned to Quirk and Greenbaum's reference grammar, A Contemporary Grammar of English, as their guide for grammar; for pronunciation, they continue to rely on American pronunciation manuals with some selectivity on what to teach.

There is NO reference grammar of Philippine English although an attempt has been planned to compile a list of Filipinisms (Llamzon 1969); there is no dictionary of Philippine calques or an inventory of dialectal Philippine verb-prepositional combinations.

When one asks a Filipino teacher of English about what standard to use, in spite of the linguistic and sociolinguistic realities described, invariably he or she still turns to the American manuals.

I suppose this is one way of solving a practical problem.

In the meantime, one can perhaps say with some measure of accuracy that Philippine English is in a state of flux and is in a process of standardization, with the consensus clear only on which variety is the most acceptable for the spoken phase and with a conservative stance taken on all other features of English, whether spoken or written.

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12